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Could New Dead Sea Scrolls Research Help to Confirm the Reliability of the Bible?

Justin Rogers, Ph.D.

A FASCINATING new peer-reviewed journal article, recently published in the open access journal *PLoS One*, presents data that may challenge the long-held scholarly consensus that the book of Daniel reached its final form between 167 and 164 B.C.¹ The problem with this consensus, as I have attempted to show,² is that the book of Daniel represents itself as a product of the sixth century. Simply put, one has a hard time harmonizing the critical scholarly theory of Daniel's date with a firm belief in the Bible's reliability. Most critical scholars simply jettison the book of Daniel as a reliable source, treating its main characters as legendary. For example, a leading critical scholar in the field states, "According to the consensus of modern critical scholarship, the stories about Daniel and his friends are legendary in character, and the hero himself most probably never existed."³ This consensus has gone unthreatened among liberal scholars for more than a century.

Regarding the critical dating of the book of Daniel, even the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls did not seem to challenge the consensus. For example, Frank Moore Cross, a longtime professor at Harvard University and one of the first experts on the Dead Sea Scrolls, dated the oldest of the Daniel manuscripts (4QDan^c) to "the late second century," "no more than about a half century younger than the autograph."⁴ This is a remark-

able claim since we have no other manuscript of the Bible so close to a book's date of composition. Cross reached his date on paleographic grounds. (Paleography is a science that attempts to date manuscripts based on the style of handwriting.)

Scholars who followed Cross's paleographic dating were not quite as confident about the date of the manuscript. A leading Scrolls scholar, Eugene Ulrich, dates 4QDan^c to the late second or early first century.⁵ This offers a little more wiggle room between the liberal scholarly reckoning of the book's composition in the 160s B.C. However, newly published research forces a reevaluation of the paleographic dating of the Scrolls in general, and of 4QDan^c in particular.

HOW HAS THE CRITICAL CONSENSUS BEEN CHALLENGED?

A TEAM of researchers led by world-renowned Scrolls expert Mladen Papović combines new methods of Carbon-14 dating with Artificial Intelligence programming to redate a number of Scrolls. Since the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus consists of more than 900 manuscripts, further research must be done to draw conclusions more broadly, but the current results seem promising. Using new developments in technology, the Carbon-14 dating method was employed to reevaluate the standard theories about ancient Semitic paleography.

The Artificial Intelligence model, termed "Enoch," utilizes "Bayesian

ridge regression" to predict the dates of manuscripts based on "binarized" images of the scrolls. The Enoch Model's paleographic analysis validates the Carbon-14 dating in more than 85% of cases. This result was deemed good enough to apply to 135 other Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts whose dates are in doubt. The work of the Enoch Model was checked against the sentiments of human experts in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic paleography, and the human experts deemed 79% of its predictions to be reliable. In other words, the researchers attempt to bring together old and trusted methods with exciting new leaps forward in technology to triple-check the credibility of scholarly claims.

The practical takeaway from this study is that some of the Scrolls are much older than previously thought. First, the new Carbon-14 dating tests and AI paleographic analysis allow us to push back the date of some manuscripts by 50 years or more. This news is significant on its own. But the study also demonstrates that the Hebrew and Aramaic scripts used in the period, typically termed the "Hasmonean" and "Herodian" scripts, respectively, are older than previously thought. Scholars have long believed that these scripts were in transition around the mid-first century B.C. In other words, previous paleographers have been inclined to date a manuscript with the "Herodian" script to the late first century B.C. at the earliest, while the "Hasmonean" script manuscripts could be dated earlier. The new research suggests that the two scripts actually coexisted from a much earlier period, making previous paleographic theories about the Dead Sea Scrolls unreliable.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO DANIEL?

ONE of the sample manuscripts analyzed is the oldest known copy of the

book of Daniel. As we have previously mentioned, Cross (and those who follow him) have comfortably dated this manuscript, on paleographic grounds, to the late second century B.C. Ulrich might push this date even further forward, to the first half of the first century B.C. These dates allow the original composition of the book of Daniel to fall in the 160s, as liberal scholars have traditionally maintained. However, Popović and his collaborators conclude their reanalysis of the Carbon-14 and paleographic evidence as follows: “Sample 4Q114 [i.e., 4QDan^c] is one of the most significant findings of the ¹⁴C results. The manuscript preserves Daniel 8-11, which scholars date on literary-historical grounds to the 160s BCE. The accepted 2σ calibrated range for 4Q114, 230-160 BCE, overlaps with the period in which the final part of the biblical book of Daniel was presumably authored.”⁶

This statement is hard to believe. The authors do not wish to dismiss the scholarly consensus, so they suggest that 4QDan^c dates to the book’s exact time of composition. In other words, they do not claim that the manuscript is an original copy of Daniel, but certainly contemporary with the original copies. To put it mildly, this claim is unlikely to be true. Still, the researchers allow the manuscript to be authored in “the 160s BCE,” which is decades older than Cross and Ulrich previously thought. This alone is significant.

Moreover, we should note that the authors bias the interpretation of their evidence. Since liberal scholars require the book of Daniel to have reached its final form in the 160s, any potential date earlier than that threatens to upend the consensus. The dates “230-160 BCE” are obviously broader than most scholars would call “the period in which the final part of the biblical book of Daniel was presumably authored.” I

understand that these date ranges are intended to account for a margin of error, but they include what scholars usually call the *terminus post quem* (“the date after which”) and the *terminus ante quem* (“the date before which”), respectively. While Popović and his collaborators are cautious to allow room for the scholarly consensus, their data suggest the possibility that the consensus date of Daniel is objectively wrong.

Scholars believe that the book of Daniel had to be composed prior to 164 B.C. because it does not clearly mention the death of the anti-Jewish tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes. However, the book does mention atrocities committed during his reign, specifically ones dating during the years 167-164 B.C. Daniel chapters 8-11 refer to Antiochus as the “little horn” (8:9), and mention with great specificity the events of his reign, such as interrupting Temple sacrifice (8:11-12), his war with the Ptolemies (11:20-35), and his exaltation of himself as a god (11:36-45). These incredibly detailed passages match precisely the historical realities as documented in the books of 1-2 Maccabees and in Greek historians such as Polybius. Yet, Antiochus’s death is only obliquely referred to (11:45). Thus, the critical assumption emerges that the book was composed during the reign of, but prior to the death of, Antiochus IV.

To be clear, one of the primary reasons liberal scholars deny the book of Daniel a sixth-century date is that they assume it is impossible for the biblical authors to know the future with precision. Predictive prophecies like those found in Daniel 8-11 must be regarded, as the German critic Otto Eissfeldt once called them, *vaticinia ex eventu*, or “prophecies after the event.”⁷ In other words, the so-called “prophecies” of Daniel are really no prophecies at all,

but historical reflections on events that occurred in recent memory. This is the scholarly consensus. If Popović and his collaborators are correct, the new dates assigned to the oldest manuscript of Daniel might force a change in how scholars date the book of Daniel.

CONCLUSION

THE historical accuracy of the book of Daniel regarding the anti-Jewish persecutions of Antiochus IV is virtually uncontested. Critical scholars usually explain this accuracy by simply arguing that the author was not a prophet of the sixth century, but an eyewitness to the events of the 160s B.C. **The possibility that a manuscript of the book (4QDan^c) could be older than the events it records forces a reevaluation of the predictive power of Scripture.** Whether Daniel was composed in circa 530 B.C. (as Bible believers traditionally maintain) or in circa 230 B.C. (the oldest possible date of 4QDan^c) is irrelevant. Any date prior to the reign of Antiochus IV not only means the critical consensus is wrong, but also that the predictive prophecy of Scripture is right.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Popović Mladen, Maruf A. Dhali, Lambert Schomaker, Kaare Lund Rasmussen, Jacopo La Nasa, Ilaria Degano, Maria Perla Colombini, and Eibert Tigchelaar (2025), “Dating Ancient Manuscripts Using Radiocarbon and AI-based Writing Style Analysis,” *PLoS One* 20[6], e0323185, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0323185>.
- ² Justin Rogers (2016), “The Date of Daniel: Does It Matter?” *Reason & Revelation*, 36[12]:134-137, 141-143, December.
- ³ John J. Collins (1993), *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* in *Hermeneia Old Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress), p. 1.
- ⁴ Frank Moore Cross (1961), *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), p. 43.
- ⁵ Eugene Ulrich (2001), “The Text of Daniel From Qumran,” in *The Book of Daniel: Composition and Reception*, ed. John J. Collins and Peter W. Flint (Leiden: Brill), 2:574.
- ⁶ Popović, et al., 20[6]:3.
- ⁷ Otto Eissfeldt (1965), *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row), p. 517.

FROM MARS HILL TO GOLGOTHA: *Paul's Bridge Between Two Rocks of Judgment*

Jonathan Moore, D.P.M., Ph.D.

IN ancient Athens, a massive rock known as Mars Hill—or the Areopagus [Ἀρειος Πάγος]—stood near the Acropolis as a site laden with mythology, law, and philosophical inquiry. The Greek name translates to “Ares’ Rock,” a name derived from the myth in which Ares, god of war, was tried here by other gods for the murder of Halirrhothius, son of Poseidon. This ancient tribunal became synonymous with judgment, a role it would carry into the time of the Apostle Paul, who later engaged with philosophers here.

On a different hill outside Jerusalem called Golgotha, another judgment would take place, not in myth but in the harsh reality of Roman crucifixion. Unlike Mars Hill, Golgotha was not a place of philosophical debate but of ultimate sacrifice, as Jesus Christ gave His life for humankind (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). In Acts 17, Paul confronts the philosophers of Athens on Mars Hill, redirecting their focus from myth and idolatry to the Creator, contrasting two rocks of judgment: one of mythical gods and one of the living God who offers true salvation through resurrection.

THE AREOPAGUS: A PLACE OF JUDGMENT AND INQUIRY

THE Areopagus lies northwest of the Acropolis, 250 meters from the imposing temple complex of Athena. The rocky hill (rising over 70 feet above the agora) itself functioned as a critical institution in ancient Greece, serving as the high court of appeal for criminal and civil cases. Known in Greek as “martial peak,” the Areopagus combined its symbolic connection to Ares with a reputation for strict, impartial justice. Parties brought before this court were positioned between sacrificial remains, swearing oaths by the infernal deities. Here, truth was paramount, as testimonies were given without emotional manipulation to ensure fairness.¹

By the time of Paul, Mars Hill was as much a center for philosophical debate as it was for legal cases. Athenians and foreigners alike would gather to discuss the nature of the divine and the meaning of life. On this hill, Paul encountered Epicureans and Stoics, the leading philosophical schools of his day. Epicureans, following Epicurus, argued that pleasure was life’s highest aim, though they emphasized rational, restrained pleasure rather than indulgence. They dis-

missed any notion of divine intervention in human affairs, seeing gods as indifferent. In contrast, the Stoics, founded by Zeno of Citium, embraced a worldview in which everything was governed by Fate, seeing virtue and emotional self-control as the pathway to happiness. Their deity was a cosmic force, bound to Fate, in stark contrast to Paul’s personal, sovereign Creator.

Paul’s Address to the Unknown God

Paul’s opening words on Mars Hill highlight the Athenians’ pervasive religiosity: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22).² The city, saturated with idols, had even erected an altar “to an unknown god” (Acts 17:23, NIV). Paul seizes this symbol of uncertainty to declare that the God they worship in ignorance is indeed knowable—the Creator of heaven and earth, who “does not live in temples made by man” (Acts 17:24). By this, Paul directly challenges the Athenians’ pantheon, where gods were represented by lifeless stones and idols. Instead, he presents the true God, who is not confined to altars but is the source of life and breath.

The Areopagus was, therefore, not merely a location but a microcosm of the Athenian quest for truth—a place where philosophical ideas about human existence and divinity were debated with intense scrutiny. Yet, Paul insists that the Athenians’ knowledge is incomplete. His appeal climaxes with the resurrection: “He has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). In a city and location dominated by lifeless idols, Paul boldly introduces the reality of a living God, validated by Jesus Christ’s resurrection.

GOLGOTHA: THE REALITY OF JUDGMENT AND REDEMPTION

IN contrast to Mars Hill, Golgotha—meaning “Place of the Skull”—was not a place of myth but a site grounded in history, located just outside Jerusalem’s walls. Archaeological excavations led by Kathleen Kenyon³ in the 1960s revealed that Golgotha was part of a quarry used until the first century B.C., a conclusion supported by the Gospel descriptions that it lay outside the city (John 19:20). Over time, this abandoned quarry area likely became gardens or fields, as indicated by traces of plowing and other agricultural activities, corresponding to the Gospel accounts that speak of surrounding gardens (Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26; John 19:41).

The topography of Golgotha, a hill outside the city, added to its ominous reputation as a place of judgment, fitting the Romans’ practice of executing criminals in visible, public locations to emphasize the consequences of defying Rome. Excavations have further uncovered Roman-era artifacts, such as debris layers from the Jewish-Roman wars, which indicate periods of rebuilding and destruction after Jesus’ crucifixion. Golgotha was a stark, elevated outcrop that provided visibility, making it a fitting site for the climactic judgment of Jesus, where the sin of humanity was judged through His sacrifice. In sharp contrast, Mars Hill’s fame lies in its cultural associations with philosophy and legend.

The significance of Golgotha rests in its transformation from a place of death to a symbol of hope through Christ’s resurrection. Jesus represents peace and reconciliation, transforming Golgotha into a place of redemption. Here, Paul’s message at Mars Hill finds its fulfillment. He juxtaposes the silent deities of

Athenian myth with the living God, declaring, “We ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man” (Acts 17:29). The judgment at Golgotha is no myth; it is a testament to the divine mercy and justice enacted on behalf of all humanity.

CONNECTING MARS HILL TO GOLGOTHA

PAUL’S message on Mars Hill is not only a critique of Athenian idolatry but an invitation to bridge two vastly different conceptions of divinity. Mars Hill represented a judicial tradition where justice was intertwined with stories of gods like Ares. While the judicial system on Mars Hill may have attempted to maintain impartiality, the Athenian justice system was based on gods who themselves made foolish choices and were driven by selfish whims. Golgotha, on the other hand, demonstrates the true impartiality and selflessness of the living God who was willing to allow His only son to die for all humankind. While the Areopagus sym-

bolized human attempts to grapple with concepts of justice and divinity, Golgotha represented the ultimate act of divine judgment, grounded not in myth but in Christ’s real sacrifice.

Myth Versus Reality: Theological Implications

Mars Hill embodies a philosophical ideal bound to myth, a culture of gods lacking compassion or reality. Ares embodied conflict and vengeance, traits that offered no hope for humanity. While Ares was being tried for a murder that he did commit, Jesus was the victim of capital punishment, though He was innocent of any crimes. Ares was guilty (although acquitted), and Jesus was guiltless (and still condemned). Golgotha represents a profound theological truth. Where Mars Hill’s idols were static symbols of human longing and shortcoming, Golgotha stands as the culmination of God’s plan of redemption, where a man—Christ—bore the penalty of sin for all.

(cont. on p. 8)

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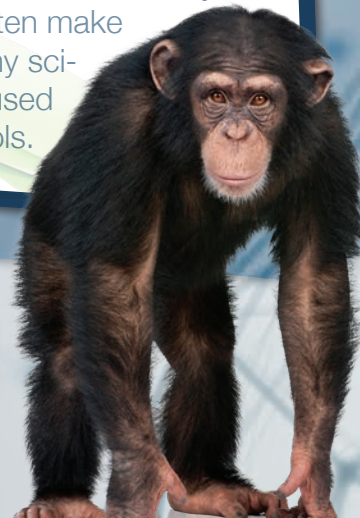
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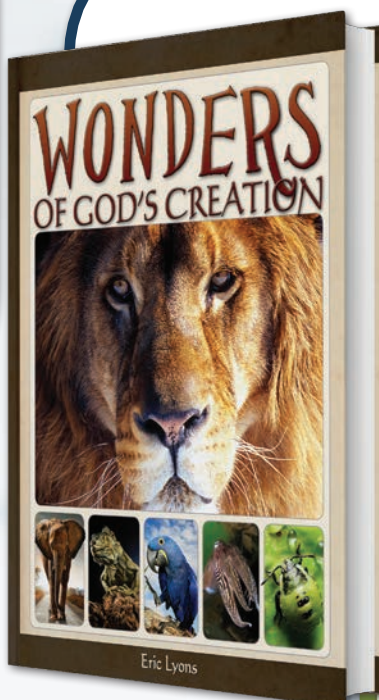
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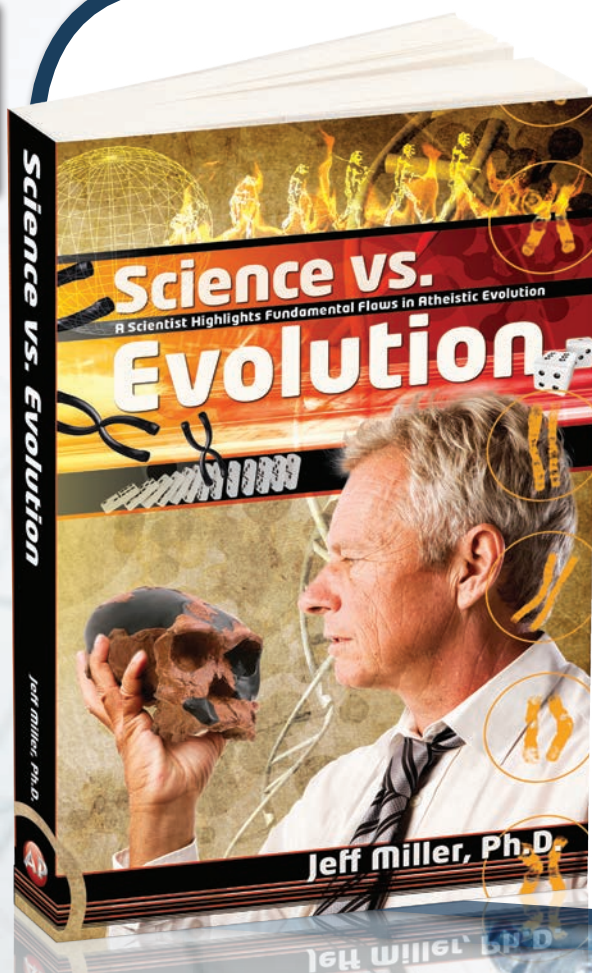
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When Paul speaks of the resurrection, he highlights the sharp difference between Athens' gods and the God of Israel. While the gods of Ares' Rock remained forever silent, the God of Golgotha validated His power through the resurrection of Jesus. This cornerstone of Paul's argument underscores that Golgotha, unlike Mars Hill, represents true justice, love, and life. "For in him we live and move and have our being," Paul declares, quoting a Greek poet (Acts 17:28) while pointing his listeners away from their lifeless idols to the living Creator.

Paul's words at the Areopagus accentuate the futility of worshipping lifeless stones (Acts 17:29). Here, Paul draws from Deuteronomy and Psalms, emphasizing that the God he proclaims is not an object of human invention, but the Creator who desires a relationship with humanity. The unknown god of Mars Hill finds clarity and fulfillment in Golgotha's sacrifice. Paul's words, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), signify the urgency of his message, encouraging Athenians to turn from myth to the reality of Christ.

CONCLUSION: AN INVITATION FROM MYTH TO REALITY

IN his sermon on Mars Hill, Paul bridges the cultural and theological gap between two rocks of judgment, inviting his audience to transition from myth to reality, from lifeless idols to the living God. He does not simply critique their traditions; he reveals the incompleteness of their understanding. The resurrection, central to his argument, stands as proof of God's power over death and the true path to life. Paul's declaration that God "does not live in temples made by

man" (Acts 17:24) points away from the temples of Athens toward the living temple found in Christ.

Through Paul's speech, Mars Hill becomes a steppingstone to Golgotha, offering an invitation to all who seek truth to move beyond philosophy and myth, finding ultimate judgment and mercy in the redemptive act of Christ. By presenting the God of resurrection, Paul calls the Athenians—and all who hear—to turn from lifeless stones to the living "cornerstone" of faith (1 Peter 2:6-8).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Lysias (6.14) described the Areopagus as the most revered and impartial court in Athens. Sophocles, in *Oedipus at Colonus* (947-949), portrays Creon praising the Council as a body known for its wise deliberation, while Euripides, in *Orestes* (1650-1652), has Apollo assure Orestes that the Areopagus would judge his case with utmost fairness. The court's dignity and esteemed reputation are also highlighted by Aristophanes' decision never to satirize its activities, and it was deemed inappropriate to display humor in the presence of its members (Aeschin, 1.81-84). In the 1st century B.C., Diodorus (1.75.3) ranked the Areopagus alongside Sparta's Council as one of the finest judicial bodies in Greece [E. Harris (2021), "Areopagus," *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, August 31, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-703>]. This

respect reflects the Athenians' high regard for the rule of law, with the Areopagus symbolizing stability and order. During his visit to Athens, the Apostle Paul addressed the Areopagus, discussing theology and denouncing false idols, leading to several conversions (Acts 17:16-34). Even in Paul's time, the Areopagus retained its status as Athens' most esteemed court, representing the city's deep respect for the rule of law [Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (2011), "The Guardian of the Land: The Areopagus Council as a Symbol of Stability," in *Stability and Crisis in the Athenian Democracy*, ed. Gabriel Herman (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag), 103-126].

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this article are taken from the English Standard Version.

³ Kathleen M. Kenyon (1967), *Jerusalem: Excavating 3000 Years of History* (New York: McGraw Hill), pp. 151-153; Kathleen M. Kenyon (1974), *Digging Up Jerusalem* (London: Ernest Benn Limited), pp. 227-231, 261.



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Could There Really Have Been Over a MILLION Israelites by the Exodus?

Jeff Miller, Ph.D.

*"But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them... they multiplied and grew... and the people multiplied and grew very mighty."
Exodus 1:7,12,20*

SCRIPTURE suggests that 215 years passed from the year Joseph's family joined him in Egypt (Genesis 46) to the Exodus.¹ Skeptics of the Bible's reliability, skeptics of the reality of an actual Israelite Exodus from Egypt, and skeptics of a 215-year short sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt (as suggested by various Bible verses) all question the feasibility of 79 individuals² producing an Israelite population numbering over 1,000,000 souls in 215 years. Do population statistics allow for such a scenario?

HOW MANY ISRAELITES EXITED EGYPT?

NUMBERS 1:20-46 tallies by tribe the number of Israelites in the Exodus, with the exception of the tribe of Levi. Verse 46 gives the total tally: 603,550. The average population of each of the listed tribes is roughly 50,000.³ So, if we assume the tribe of Levi was similar, the tally rises to 650,000 individuals. However, women were not included in the figure (verse 2). If we assume there were approximately as many women as there were men, we infer that there would have been 1,300,000 adult Israelites at the Exodus.

According to verse 3, those individuals age 19 and below also were not included in the tally. If we assume that, at the time, the Hebrews were, on average, living to age 70 (Psalm 90:10), then roughly 27% of the population was not included in Moses' tally (if we assume all age brackets had approximately the same number of

Hebrews).⁴ If so, the Hebrew population was roughly 1,780,000 at the Exodus.

Adult Male Israelite Population at Exodus According to Numbers 1	
Reuben	46,500
Simeon	59,300
Gad	45,650
Judah	74,600
Issachar	54,400
Zebulun	57,400
Ephraim	40,500
Manasseh	32,200
Benjamin	35,400
Dan	62,700
Asher	41,500
Naphtali	53,400
Total:	603,550

COULD THE HEBREW POPULATION BE THAT HIGH IN 215 YEARS?

AS described previously,⁵ one can use statistics to arrive at reasonable population estimates at different times in history, based upon certain assumptions. If the initial Hebrew population in Egypt was 79 individuals, the average lifespan of the Hebrews was 70, they continued having children for half of their lives, had 10 children on average (due to the extremely elevated birthrates implied in the

text; Exodus 1:7,12,20), and typically lived to see the births of half of their grandchildren on average (i.e., the generation length is 1.5), after 215 years, the Hebrew population would have been 1,770,000 people. Keeping in mind that if the average number of children per couple was larger or the generation length was slightly longer (e.g., 10.1 children on average and a 1.6 generation length—both of which are highly plausible), the Hebrew population quickly grows by tens of thousands.

Perhaps more notable is the fact that these calculations assume that the Hebrews gave birth to **all** of those individuals, with no males marrying outside of the Israelite family (as did Joseph, each of the other sons of Jacob, and Moses, for instance). If such marriages occurred only a fraction of the time (like the individual mentioned in Leviticus 24:10), the Hebrew population grows even higher. If, for example, intermarriage with the Egyptians occurred in only 5% of marriages,⁶ the final potential Hebrew population rises to 2,374,328. A higher percentage of such intermarriages increases the Hebrew population further and decreases the average number of children that would have been born in each home.

Also notable is the fact that the population record given in Numbers 1 may be more difficult to harmonize with, for example, a 430-year sojourn in Egypt of Jacob's family. With the same assumptions stated above, in order to match the Hebrew population at the time of

the Exodus in 430 years, the average number of children per family must be roughly four (and with little intermarriage outside of the Hebrew lineage). This scenario would be difficult to reconcile with (1) the lack of birth control methods at the time; (2) the notable alarm exhibited by the Egyptians as they observed the Hebrew population growth (Exodus 1:9-10,12); or (3) the thrice highlighted abnormality of the population explosion being witnessed at the time (Exodus 1:7,12,20).

Bottom line: the biblical claim about the Hebrew population by the time of the Exodus, after only 215 years of reproduction in Egypt, is not unreasonable. On the contrary, Moses' record provides further support for the Bible's reliability and sheds light on the potential Hebrew home at the time of the Exodus.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Jonathan Moore (2025), "When and Where Was Israel's Sojourn in Egypt? The Long and Short of It (Part 1)," *Reason & Revelation*, 45[2]:2-9, February.
- ² See Acts 7:14, adding to Stephen's 75, Joseph, his wife, and two sons (who were already in Egypt).
- ³ 50,296.
- ⁴ However, **with the thrice highlighted elevated Hebrew birthrates at the time** (Exodus 1:7,12,20), the percentage of Hebrew children in the population at the time may have been higher, depending upon how long the elevated birthrates occurred. If the child population bracket at the time of the Exodus was 25% higher (comprising 34% of the total population instead of 27%), the total Hebrew population rises to 1,970,000. However, if the elevated period was in effect for the entire 215-year period, the percentage of children in the population would have matched the other age brackets, lowering the estimated Hebrew population at the Exodus back to roughly 1,780,000.
- ⁵ Jeff Miller (2011), "Population Statistics and a Young Earth," *Reason & Revelation*, 31[5]:41-47, May; see also Walter Lammerts, ed. (1971), *Scientific Studies in Special Creation* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed).
- ⁶ In the population algorithms, this scenario was modeled as each couple having 10.5 children on average instead of 10 children.

How Does God PROVE That He Is God?

Donnie DeBord, Ph.D.

ONE of the striking ways God proves His existence and distinguishes Himself from all false gods is by demonstrating His perfect knowledge of the future. Nowhere is this clearer than in Isaiah 45-46, where God declares that He alone is the Lord over history, able to foretell events before they occur. While idols are powerless, and human rulers are blind to what lies ahead, God alone knows and shapes the course of history. His ability to declare the future proves that He alone is God.

GOD'S CHALLENGE TO THE NATIONS

IN Isaiah 45, God speaks through Isaiah to Cyrus, the Persian king, over a century before Cyrus is even born.¹ The Lord declares, "I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me" (Isaiah 45:4, ESV). This prophecy is stunning: God identifies Cyrus long before he appears in history and declares that he will be the instrument of Israel's deliverance. Isaiah 46 continues this theme. Here, God contrasts Himself with the idols of Babylon, which must be carried on the backs of animals (Isaiah 46:1-2). These false gods are burdensome, helpless, and mute. In contrast, the Lord declares, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done" (Isaiah 46:9-10, ESV).

This is a direct challenge to anyone who doubts God's existence or God's perfect knowledge of the

future. Unlike the lifeless idols that require human hands to move them, God moves history itself. No pagan deity can do this. False gods and false conceptions of God must remain silent because they have no knowledge of the future. But the true God predicts and ensures what will happen.

CONCLUSION

GOD'S ability to declare the future is a display of His divinity. This is one reason why the prophecy of Cyrus is so significant. Cyrus does not know the God of Israel, yet he fulfills God's will precisely as foretold. The Persian king's actions are not outside of God's influence but are part of His divine plan. This truth is meant to bring comfort to God's people. If God alone knows the future, and if the future unfolds according to His purpose, then those who trust Him need not fear. The Israelites might have doubted their God, but Isaiah reminds them that their deliverance is already assured because the One who reveals the future remains Lord of the future.

The God of the Bible is God alone. He proves this through His perfect knowledge of the future. He alone declares the end from the beginning.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For evidence of the book of Isaiah being written in the 8th century B.C. (cf. Isaiah 1:1), 150 years before Cyrus of Persia lived, see Clyde M. Woods' commentary on Isaiah; John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, chs 1-39*; and E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*.

WHO Did Nebuchadnezzar See in the Furnace?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

THE Bible treats us to many amazing occasions in human history during the age of miracles, when God demonstrated His presence in a marvelous manner. One such instance is seen in the life of Daniel's three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They infuriated the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar by refusing to bow down to the image he had constructed. They openly defied the king by declaring their trust in God and His ability to deliver them from the king's wrath. What's more, they brazenly stated their unwillingness to worship the image—even if God chose not to rescue them.

Full of fury, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace to be heated well beyond its usual temperature. Daniel's three companions were then thrown into the furnace, which, in turn, resulted in the deaths of those who placed them there. The Bible then reads:

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like **the Son of God**" (Daniel 3:24-25, NKJV).

The original manuscripts of the Bible do not typically include punctuation and capitalization. Translators must make those decisions as best they can. However, they sometimes create misimpressions by their

decisions, forcing the English reader to interpret a passage incorrectly. Such is certainly the case with the words "the Son of God." The English reader would inevitably understand the phrase "the Son of God" to be a reference to Jesus. The resulting conclusion is that Jesus made a pre-incarnate visit to the furnace to rescue Daniel's companions.

However, surely a pagan Babylonian king would have no knowledge of Jesus Christ—let alone know what He looked like. For that matter, neither would Daniel or his three friends. While the Old Testament prophets prophesied of the coming Messiah, their understanding of His person would have been woefully incomplete, since the fulfillment of those prophecies was yet far into the future. (See 1 Peter 1:10-11.)

In addition to the fact that the manuscripts do not capitalize "son" and "God," additional grammatical features are worthy of note. First, the Hebrew text has no article "the" before "son." Hence, it can just as easily read "a" son of God. Second, the Hebrew word for "God" (*elohim*) is a generic term that must not be confused with the divine name (Yahweh/YHWH) that refers exclusively to the God of the Bible. *Elohim* has the same latitude of meaning as the English word "God." The exact same word can refer to the God of the Bible, or it can be used to refer to any "god"—from the Hindu gods Vishnu and Durga to the gods of Native Americanism. The same Hebrew word for "God" is used, for example, in Exodus 20:23 to refer to "gods": "You shall

not make anything to be with Me—**gods** of silver or **gods** of gold you shall not make for yourselves."¹ God even used the term in the giving of the Ten Commandments to refer to false gods: "You shall have no other gods (*elohim*) before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Further, it so happens that the Hebrew term *elohim* is a plural noun. Hence, it can refer to "gods" plural.

It makes perfect sense, then, that what the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar intended by his declaration was that the fourth figure in the fiery furnace was like a son of the gods—i.e., a celestial being of some sort. The king, in fact, clarified his own statement after the three companions emerged unscathed from the furnace: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, **who sent His Angel** and delivered His servants who trusted in Him" (vs. 28). Nebuchadnezzar simply considered the fourth being to be some sort of supernatural, angelic being who was sent by Daniel's God to rescue them from the furnace.

Several English translations recognize these grammatical nuances. The 1901 American Standard Version has "a son of the gods." A host of other translations also so translate the verse, including the ESV, NASB, NCV, NIV, RSV, WEB, and YLT. The CJB has "and the fourth looks like one of the gods." The ISV has "resembles a divine being," which captures the meaning perfectly.²

ENDNOTES

¹ Such is the case in many passages throughout the Old Testament, including Exodus 12:12; 15:11; 18:11; 23:13,24,32,33; etc.

² Again, some have suggested that the third being in the furnace was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus. While such is certainly a possibility, we cannot know with certainty. Compare, for example, such passages as Genesis 18:1 and 1 Corinthians 10:4. However, as noted, we can be certain that the pagan Babylonian monarch (as well as Daniel and the three Hebrew youths) was unacquainted with Jesus.



NOTE FROM *The Editor*



AP Staff Spotlight: Our Newest Team Member—Isabella Kidwell

It is not every day that AP hires a new employee, but when we do, it's someone who shares our values and vision. Meet Isabella Kidwell.

A May 2025 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University, Isabella earned her Bachelor of Arts in History with a Licensure in Teaching. (She also studied abroad one semester and took several challenging Bible classes, including two semesters of Greek.) In June, Isabella (formerly Isabella Baker) married Nate Kidwell, and together, they serve the Dalraida church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, where Nate is the college minister. (Isabella grew up at Dalraida, making her continued involvement there especially meaningful.)

Isabella is no stranger to Apologetics Press. As far back as she can remember, she used AP materials—from our creation flashcards and Bible class curriculum in her younger years to reading more advanced AP materials as she grew older. Though secondary to her parents' godly leadership growing up, AP was honored to play a role in shaping her spiritual growth, most notably through the AP Camp at Indian Creek Youth Camp, which she has fondly



described as her favorite week of the year for over a decade. AP Camp (the first full week of June in Oakman, Alabama) consistently provided her with rich spiritual instruction, meaningful relationships, and encouragement in her walk with God.

It is especially gratifying to welcome someone so personally invested in our work to become a vital part of it. Lord willing, Isabella's wide-ranging talents will be utilized across several AP departments—including youth, advancement, and distribution. At one moment, Isabella may be giving tours of AP, and the next, talking to a VBS director about how to effectively utilize a particular AP VBS curriculum. One day, she'll be proofreading children's curriculum, and the next, creating and uploading PowerPoints for teachers and preachers to freely download from the AP website. Isabella will also occasionally travel to various conferences to work the AP booth. If and when you have the pleasure of meeting Isabella, be sure to congratulate her on her new position at Apologetics Press.

Eric Lyons
Executive Director